

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7000
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4803

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, IS
SUBJECT: BEGIN'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON: BEGIN THE INDIVIDUAL

REF: TEL AVIV 3611

SUMMARY: THE STEEL IN BEGIN'S CHARACTER WAS TEMPRED
IN THE CRUCIBLES OF ZIONIST POLITICS, THE HOLOCAUST
AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CREATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL.
FROM THESE EXPERIENCES, BEGIN HAS REACHED THE CON-
CLUSION THAT PASSIVITY AND ACCOMMODATION HAVE BEEN
FUNDAMENTAL FACTORS IN THE DISASTERS OF JEWISH HISTORY,
AND THAT THE JEWISH PEOPLE MUST BE RESOLUTE AND WITHOUT
ILLUSIONS IN DEFENDING THEIR INTERESTS. HIS BELIEF IN
A GREATER ISRAEL AND IN THE UNIQUE MISSION OF THE
JEWISH PEOPLE THEREIN ARE HIS INHERITANCE FROM
JABOTINSKY'S REVISIONISM, AND HAVE MOLDED HIS VIEW
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OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. BEGIN IS NEITHER A
FANATIC NOR AN IDEOLOGUE, BUT INSTEAD AN INDIVIDUAL OF
DEEP CONVICTIONS AND PRINCIPLES. THE QUESTON AS TO
WHETHER HE IS AN INTRANSIGIENT HARLINER OR A TOUGH
BARGINER IN NEGOTIATINS, WHICH CONCERNS SO MANY
COMMENTATORS, IS UNANSWERABLE IN THE ABSTRACT.HE CAN
BE EXPECTED TO HOLD TO IS PRINCIPLES, AND PESENT

THE ISRAELI CASE WITH GREAT LUCIDITY AND VIGOR IN HIS MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT. HE IS COMING TO WASHINGTON TO HAVE A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE ON U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR NEGOTIATIONS, AND IS NOT SEEKING A CONFRONTATION WITH US.END SUMMARY.

1. THIS MESSAGE SUPPLEMENTS THE AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY, "BEGIN: MOSES OR SAMSON" (REFTEL). OUR OBJECTIVE HERE IS TO DESCRIBE HIS VALUES AND GENERAL APPROACH, NOT TO TRY TO PREDICT HIS RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC ISSUES IN THIS MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT.

2. BEGIN IS A MAN OF DEEP CONVICTIONS, PROFOUND LEARNING AND STRONG BELIEFS. HE REGARDS HIMSELF AS, AND INDEED IS, A MAN OF PRINCIPLE. HE HAS FOUGHT LONG AND HARD FOR HIS BELIEFS IN ZIONIST POLITICS, ENDURED IMPRISONMENT IN A SOVIET LABOR CAMP DURING WORLD WAR II, HEADED THE UNDERGROUND IRGUN MOVEMENT IN MANDATORY PALESTINE, AND HELD TO HIS VIEWS STEADFASTLY DURING 29 YEARS IN THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, IT SEEMS TO US THAT ON MATTERS WHICH HE REGARDS AS BEING OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE HE WILL HOLD FIRMLY TO HIS PRINCIPLES. AT THE SAME TIME, HE IS NEITHER A FANATIC NOR AN UNBIDDING IDEOLOGUE AS FREQUENTLY DEPICTED IN THE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA.
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3. ANALYZING THE LESSONS OF JEWISH HISTORY AND THE HOLOCAUST, BEGIN BELIEVES THAT PASSIVITY AND DOCILE ACCOMMODATION ALMOST INVARIABLY HAVE BROUGHT DISASTER TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO OVERESTIMATE THE HOLOCAUST'S IMPACT ON BEGIN; LIKE MANY OTHER ISRAELIS OF HIS GENERATION OF EUROPEAN ORIGIN, HE LOST HIS ENTIRE FAMILY. THE HEROIC BATTLE, AS HE SEES IT, OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE FOR AN INDEPENDENT STATE IS A REVERSAL OF THIS HISTORICAL PATTERN OF PASSIVITY AND DESTRUCTION. LINKED TO THIS VIEW IS BEGIN'S QUASI-MYSTICAL BELIEF IN THE SPECIAL MISSION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE WHOSE FULFILLMENT LIES ONLY IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL, A BELIEF WHICH OFTEN FINDS PROPHETIC AND MESSIANIC EXPRESSION IN HIS SPEECHES.

4. BEGIN VIEWS HIMSELF TODAY AS THE POLITICAL HEIR AND IDEOLOGICAL DISCIPLE OF ZEV JABOTINSKY, THE PRE-STATE LEADER OF THE REVISIONIST MOVEMENT. REVISIONISM AT ITS HEIGHT - I.E., BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE STATE - ESPOUSED A ROMANTIC NATIONALIST ZIONISM IN WHICH DRAMATIC ACTION WAS TO GALVANIZE WORLD JEWRY BEHIND

THE CAUSE OF GREATER ISRAEL. BEGIN VIEWS JABOTINSKY AS A LEADER WHO WAS NOT DETERRED FROM HIS LARGER OBJECTIVES BY ILLUSIONS OR WISHFUL THINKING AND WAS ABLE TO ARTICULATE BASIC GOALS IN A CLEAR MANNER. HE HAS TRIED TO EMULATE THESE QUALITIES.

5. IN THE LEXICON OF POST WORLD WAR II POLITICAL SCIENCE, BEGIN IS A COLD WARRIOR. HE VIEWS U.S./SOVIET RELATIONS AS A POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL STRUGGLE BEING PLAYED OUT ON A WORLD-WIDE ARENA FOR THE PRESERVATION OF LIBERAL/DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS. HE BELIEVES THAT THE MIDDLE EAST IS A KEY ARENA FOR U.S./SOVIET CONFRONTATION, AND IS CONVINCED THAT ISRAEL HAS PLAYED AND SHOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY A VITAL

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ROLE IN ASSISTING THE U.S. IN THIS STRUGGLE. HE IS HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC OF DETENTE.

6. BEGIN'S LEGAL TRAINING HAS INFLUENCED HIS STYLE AND APPROACH. HE EMPLOYS LOGICAL ANALYSIS BASED ON THE ACCUMULATION OF EVIDENCE AND PRECEDENT TO MAKE HIS POINTS. HE BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF THE WRITTEN AND SPOKEN WORD, HOLDING THAT REASON AND THE EVIDENCE OF HISTORY CARRY THEIR OWN PERSUASIVE WEIGHT. IN LEGAL PARLANCE, HE IS STRICT CONSTRUCTIONIST. INTERNATIONAL TEXTS (E.G., SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS, ARMISTICE AGREEMENTS),

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4803

EXDIS

HE BELIEVES, ARE TO BE INTERPRETED IN A STRICT AND
LITERAL MANNER. HE IS A "MAN OF THE BOOK."

7. BEGIN IS HIGHLY SELF-DISCIPLINED INTELLECTUALLY, AND
STRIVES FOR CLARITY AND ACCURACY IN HIS THINKING. HE
HAS AN EXCELLENT MEMORY AND A SHARP ANALYTICAL MIND.
IN A CAREFUL AND ALMOST SCHOLARLY FASHION, HE IS PREPARING
FOR HIS MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT BY CAREFULLY REVIEWING
AND FAMILIARIZING HIMSELF IN DETAIL WITH THE HISTORICAL
RECORD, PROBABLY TO INCLUDE EVERYTHING HE CAN FIND THAT
THE PRESIDENT HAS WRITTEN OR SAID.

8. BEGIN HAS HIGH REGARD FOR PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS
AND PROCEDURES. HE ENJOYS PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE AND
AT HIS BEST MOMENTS IS THE MASTER OF IT. WHILE IN
PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS EMINENTLY POLITE AND CORDIAL, IN
THE PUBLIC ARENA HE CAN BE BY TURNS BOMBASTIC, PEDANTIC,
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OUTSPOKEN AND CUTTINGLY CRITICAL. HE HAS A WELL-HONED
EDGE OF SARCASM HELD IN RESERVE FOR APPROPRIATE TARGETS
AND MOMENTS. IN THE HEAT OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS OR IN
MOMENTS OF HIGH TENSION, HE HAS NOT SHIED AWAY FROM
USING EFFECTS AND LANGUAGE WHICH SOME REGARD AS
DEMAGOGUERY.

9. BEFORE THE MAY ELECTIONS, BEGIN WAS VIEWED BY MANY
OF HIS ISRAELI CONTEMPORARIES PRIMARILY AS AN UNYIELDING
AND TOUGH POLITICIAN WHO HAD PUSHED ASIDE ALL POTENTIAL
CHALLENGERS (PARTICULARLY WEIZMAN, TAMIR AND SHARON) TO
CEMENT HIS HOLD OVER THE HERUT PARTY. HIS SUPPORTERS
SPOKE OF HIS INTELLECTUAL RIGOR, HIS PERSONAL INTEGRITY,
AND HIS CALMNESS IN CRISES; HIS DETRACTORS AND OPPONENTS
SAW HIM - IN RABIN'S WORDS - AS A RELIC, A THROWBACK TO
AN EARLIER ERA WHO WAS TOO STUBBORN TO GIVE WAY TO
YOUNGER LEADERS. IN THE WAKE OF HIS ELECTION, A NEW
PUBLIC IMAGE OF BEGIN HAS BEGUN TO EMERGE HERE - THE
IMAGE OF A SOBER AND THOUGHTFUL NATIONAL LEADER WHO HAS
A CLEAR AND REALISTIC PERCEPTION OF THE CHALLENGES,

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL, FACING THE NATION. MANY ISRAELIS NOW WELCOME HIS LEADERSHIP, HOPING THAT HIS FORTHRIGHTNESS AND INTEGRITY WILL GIVE ISRAELIES RENEWED PRIDE AND REFURBISH THE NATION'S TARNISHED IMAGE ABROAD.

10. BEGIN HAS THE HIGHEST REGARD FOR THE UNITED STATES, ITS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES, AND VIES US, IN HIS WORDS, AS THE LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD. HE HAS SAID REPEATEDLY THAT CLOSE U.S./ISRAELI RELATIONS ARE FUNDAMENTAL FOR ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY, AND HE HAS GENUINE BELIEF IN THE STEADFASTNESS OF OUR BASIC SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL. HE ALSO HAS A STRONG CONVICTION THAT FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS BETWEEN WORLD LEADERS CAN BRING ABOUT CHANGES IN THEIR
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APPROACHES TO COMPLEX AND SEEMINGLY INTRACTABLE INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS. HE BELIEVES THAT AT THE LEAST HE CAN PROVIDE THE PRESIDENT WITH A CLEARER APPRECIATION OF THE ISRAELI CASE AS HE SEES IT, EVEN IF THE PRESIDENT WILL NOT ENTIRELY AGREE WITH HIM. WE EXPECT THAT HE WILL MAKE A LUCID AND HIGHLY-DETAILED PRESENTATION OF THAT CASE AND OF HIS APPROACH TO ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS.

11. ISRAELIS AND FOREIGNERS ALIKE CONTINUE TO DEBATE WHAT HAS EMERGED AS THE CENTRAL POLITICAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL QUESTION REGARDING BEGIN: IS HE AN INTRANSIGENT HARD-LINER OR A TOUGH BARGAINER CAPABLE OF FLEXIBILITY? WE BELIEVE THAT THIS QUESTION IS UNANSWERABLE AS POSED, AND INDEED RESTS ON THE SHAKY FOUNDATION OF SUBJECTIVE VALUE JUDGMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS. AS WE SAID AT THE OUTSET, BEGIN WILL BE TRUE TO HIS PRINCIPLES. HE WILL NOT FLINCH FROM IN-DEPTH SUBSTANTIVE DISAGREEMENTS. BUT HE IS A HIGHLY SKILLFUL POLITICIAN AND TOUGH, REALISTIC NEGOTIATOR, WHO CAN ASSESS ACCURATELY THE WEIGHT OF THE FACTORS IN A POLITICAL EQUATION AND CAN COMPROMISE WHEN HE SEES NO OTHER CHOICE. HE IS NEITHER IRRATIONAL, IN THE SENSE OF BEING INCAPABLE OF EVALUATING THE IMPLICATIONS AND/OR CONSEQUENCES OF HIS ACTS OR STATEMENTS, NOR IRRESPONSIBLE. WE WOULD SUM UP OUR ASSESSMENT BY SAYING THAT BEGIN COMES TO WASHINGTON AS A PROUD LEADER OF HIS COUNTRY AND A STAUNCH FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES. HE IS HOPING FOR A DIALOGUE, NOT A CONFRONTATION. HE IS OPTIMISTIC THAT WITH GOOD WILL AND SINCERE EFFORT, THE VISIT WILL BE A SUCCESS FOR BOTH SIDES.
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